



11-15-2000

## John Sprockett Voices His Regrets to Sid Collier, in a Saloon in Gold Creek

Robert Cooperman

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### Recommended Citation

Cooperman, Robert (2000) "John Sprockett Voices His Regrets to Sid Collier, in a Saloon in Gold Creek," *Westview*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 26.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol20/iss1/26>

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# John Sprockett Voices His Regrets to Sid Collier, in a Saloon in Gold Creek

by Robert Cooperman

From all the sap I've tapped  
into whores' buckets, I still don't know  
if any fermented into a tyke.  
Maybe that Ute squaw bore a papoose.  
Last time I saw her, though, she was deciding  
whether to bury another knife in me,  
the one hilt-deep in my shoulder making her face  
film-over like a wild-fire in dry tinder—  
for my having killed her brother and kinsman  
when they tried to murder me for courting her.

Sooner or late, a young gun or sneaky-pete's  
going to send me to Hell; I'd like  
to see some good work of mine take root  
before I get shoveled under and forgot.  
Not so much to pass on my worthless name,  
just to bounce a baby on my knee  
and not have it scream at my face:  
looking like a branding-iron was singed  
into the wrong end of a calf or foal.  
Something small and helpless, to smile at,  
unlike my Pa, hard as his Bible's binding,  
always a harness to beat his Lord into me,  
Ma wringing her hands and reciting poetry  
to take my mind off scorched hide.





*Painting by Gary Wolgamott*

When she passed from cholera—  
Pa and me spared that Devil's black water—  
I swore if he touched me again  
I'd smash his Book across his face.  
Reeling and bleeding, he cursed me, cast me out.  
He wouldn't be able to shout, "Marked by the Lord!"  
if he could've seen I had a sweet angel-girl,  
her face soft as a rabbit's belly-fur,  
eyes to melt even the Old Testament Bellower  
Pa prayed to morning and night—  
pleading for two slabs off His marble hardness,  
to slap me toward the path of piety,  
a place Miss Starling could've led me to  
if she'd stayed. The child we might've made!